

How to Succeed With Volunteers-In-Parks

60-Minute Module Series

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS **Training Guide**

HANDOUTS

**National Park Service
Volunteers-In-Parks Program**



Guide to Handouts

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Key Concepts of Volunteer Performance Reviews

The purpose of volunteer performance reviews is to provide constructive feedback that acknowledges and enhances the volunteer's contribution to the park.

Concept 1

Successful performance reviews provide an opportunity for constructive feedback between the person who assigns work and the volunteer who performs it.

Volunteers should be apprised of the feedback system immediately upon entering their job. It is best to include current volunteers who have not previously been reviewed. Self-assessment may work best as the system is initiated.

Concept 2

Volunteer performance reviews offer numerous benefits to volunteers and to the parks they serve.

Volunteers want to be successful and generally respond well to feedback. Taking the time to review their work sends the message that you value their time and effort and that you hold them accountable for their agreement. It provides an opportunity to express appreciation. The review also enables the volunteers and the volunteer supervisor to determine if the work is meeting the needs of both parties and, as appropriate, to continue, to renegotiate, or to terminate the individual agreement.

Concept 3

At the heart of a good volunteer performance review is a shared understanding of job expectations and outcomes.

Be organized! Have the volunteer complete a self-assessment (see sample form) for discussion at a formal meeting. Review materials related to job expectations versus performance for discussion at the meeting. Be positive! Find ways to acknowledge accomplishments, to encourage improvements and to resolve problems. Be honest! Discuss future plans for the volunteer in the park.

Concept 4

Outcomes from volunteer performance reviews can range from “applause” to dismissal – by either the VIP supervisor or the volunteer.

Be helpful and supportive. Keep the volunteer involved by looking for new challenges in the job. If you note low productivity or morale, discuss other options for the volunteer. Be sure to keep a good written communication file on each volunteer. If necessary, take the appropriate steps to dismiss the volunteer.

Volunteer Performance Reviews

Definition:

Volunteer performance review provides an opportunity for the person who assigns the work, and the person who performs it, to discuss whether their expectations for themselves, and for each other, are being met.

Key Elements:

1. Volunteers, as they enter the organization, must be apprised of the feedback system, including the system for performance review. It should be described and delivered in positive, empowering terms.
2. Mutual feedback is the key. It is a time for both the volunteer and the supervisor to share their experience, with one another, in the organization.
3. Performance review should be based on previously agreed-upon goals, standards, job description, tasks, deadlines, available resources, intervening circumstances, etc.
4. The performance review should not include major surprises, when ongoing supervision, conflict resolution, etc., have taken place.
5. Depending on the size and culture of your park, the process can be formal or informal.
6. It is best to gradually include current volunteers who have not previously been reviewed. You may start out with a self-assessment system as they begin to buy into the benefits.
7. It is best if the performance review is scheduled for a specific time. Otherwise it will most likely be put off.

Volunteer Performance Reviews

Before the Session:

1. Have the volunteer fill out (think about) his/her self-assessment based on a series of questions.
2. As the supervisor, be prepared for the performance review session. Reviewing the job description, goals, and standards agreed to, and evaluate performance, versus job expectation, for the time period being reviewed.

During the Session:

1. Review the previously agreed-upon job expectations together.
2. Share some positive feedback and give appreciation for service.
3. Ask the volunteer to share their self-assessment and respond appropriately.
4. Give your assessment of the volunteer's performance, based on some format such as Outstanding, Good, Satisfactory, and Unsatisfactory.
5. Discuss any barriers the volunteer experienced in carrying out his/her job and plan for how they might be overcome in the future.
6. Discuss future plans for the volunteer in the organization (positions, goals, etc.).

After the Session:

1. Prepare a report and follow up on any action plans or agreements made.

Volunteer Self-Assessment Form

(Sample Questions)

1. Do you feel you are fulfilling the expectations of your job description, goals, etc.? If not, share your reasons for the gap.
2. How realistic was the estimated time to accomplish your volunteer work?
3. Did the organization provide adequate orientation, training, supervision and resources for you to accomplish your job? Suggestions for improvement?
4. What have been your greatest satisfactions on the job?
5. What have been your greatest disappointments on the job?
6. Were other volunteers and staff receptive and appreciative of your volunteer work?
Comment.
7. What were your areas of growth in your volunteer job?
8. Overall, I would rank my performance as:
Superior, exceeding expectations
Excellent, met expectations
Needing improvement, did not meet expectations
Comments to explain above answer:
9. What type of work and time commitment do you desire for next year?
(i.e., same position, new challenges, departure...)
10. Other comments, suggestions, etc.

Ideas for Evaluation Questions for Supervisors of Volunteers

Rate the volunteer on factors such as:

- Job performance
- People skills
- Responsibility and Motivation

People Skills: (example of rating systems)

(1)

- Adheres to confidentiality policy
- Relates well to clients, staff and volunteers
- Is courteous and tactful
- Cooperates with team of staff and co-workers
- Is well groomed and adheres to dress code

(2)

1. Superior - Exceeds requirements
2. Excellent - Accomplished tasks
3. Fair - Tasks not fully accomplished
4. Unsatisfactory - tasks not accomplished

You need to determine pertinent factors and a rating system that is appropriate for your organization and volunteers.

It is important that the volunteer and the volunteer's supervisor discuss any performance reviews and agree to the next steps, particularly if the job is not being accomplished. Numerous factors, both individual and park, may be effecting a volunteer's low productivity or morale.

A Suggested Exit Interview Form

(To be completed by the volunteer)

Date: _____

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____

Reason for leaving the park:

Please indicate your most and least satisfying experiences in the park:

Most satisfying:

Least satisfying:

Was your work setting, office space, desk, phone, etc., satisfactory?

Yes ____ No ____

Explain:

Do you feel that you had adequate support and supervision?

Yes ____ No ____

Explain:

Do you feel that you received sufficient training for your position?

Yes ____ No ____

Explain:

Do you feel that you made a significant contribution? Yes ____ No ____
Explain:

Do you feel that your work was appreciated? Yes ____ No ____
Explain:

Will you consider a volunteer position with the NPS in the future? Yes ____ No ____
Explain:

Additional Comments:

Volunteer's Signature

Interviewer's Signature

Dismissal of Volunteers

On rare occasions, we may be faced with the unpleasant task of dismissing a volunteer. It should be noted that unless you have a good management system in place (clear job descriptions, orientation and supervision, etc.) it is very difficult to fire a volunteer. Most often, firing is neglected, frequently with high costs to the individual and the park.

Reasons for dismissal:

- Misconduct
- Unsatisfactory performance
- Breach of confidentiality
- Inappropriate behavior
- Disregard of policies and procedures
- Suitable assignment not available

Alternatives to dismissal:

If the infraction is such that immediate dismissal is not called for, you may consider the following **alternatives to firing**:

1. Give a warning and develop a plan to improve behavior.
2. Provide additional training which may enable the volunteer to perform better.
3. Place in a more suitable job in the park.
4. Refer to a Volunteer Center or other agency for more suitable placement.
5. Retire the volunteer. (This is the delicate situation in which a person is unable to do a satisfactory job due to increasing mental, physical or aging problems.) You might plan a nice retirement party honoring the volunteer for his/her service.
6. Reassign to a different person in the park (if the problems stemmed from a poor personality match).

Volunteer Termination

Volunteers, like paid staff, terminate their relationship with the NPS through resignation or dismissal. In either case, it is recommended that accurate records and documentation be kept. Records are needed in case of grievance procedures or to document a volunteer's past work record with the park.

Reasons for resignation:

- Move out of area
- Volunteer job finished
- Personal or family health issues
- Changes in life situation (divorce, etc.)
- Family obligations
- Return to full-time work
- Loss of interest
- Dissatisfaction with the park
- Term is up
- Others

Exit Interview

It is advised, whenever possible, to have an exit interview with a volunteer who is leaving the organization. You can gain a great deal of information that can serve important purposes including:

- Tracking retention
- Recognizing and thanking volunteers
- Locating problems within a particular division of the park (i.e., many volunteers staying a short time/leaving early)
- Detecting any recruitment problems (i.e., accepting someone who is not appropriate for the job)
- Hopefully minimizing any bad feelings caused by the park/agency
- Providing closure to the relationship

How To Fire A Volunteer (AND SURVIVE!)

It might be difficult to imagine yourself firing a volunteer, and often it is nearly impossible to do, because the park does not have the appropriate systems in place to perform a termination. Remember that a volunteer must be clearly informed of his/her role and responsibilities through a job description and must understand from the very beginning that certain standards and expectations must be met for the success and continuation of the relationship between the volunteer and the park.

Four Essentials of Firing a Volunteer:

1. As a part of the orientation given to each volunteer, you should let them know that, on occasion, it has become necessary to terminate volunteers if their continued service is deemed to have a negative impact on fellow volunteers, paid staff, visitors, park resources, or the National Park Service. This provides the volunteer with forewarning and also informs salaried staff that volunteers can be dismissed from the park.
2. With few exceptions (i.e., observed harm to clients, theft, etc.), volunteers should not be fired until you have had an opportunity to conduct an in-depth investigation, making certain that you have proof of violation of NPS policies or performance standards. You may choose to suspend the volunteer while the investigation is taking place. Determine if there are any excusable or extenuating circumstances, and always document, in writing, your investigation and conclusions. It is advised that you confirm the termination in writing with the volunteer.
3. Firing volunteers should be handled fairly and with the utmost diplomacy. Don't apologize for your decision. Allow for an appeals process.
4. Provide notification to appropriate paid staff and other volunteers that the volunteer will no longer be working at the park.